

Every Last Shred of Sanity by TheVioletHour (TinternAbbey)

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Genre: Beverly Marsh is a Good Friend, Eddie Kaspbrak Lives, Eddie and Myra are messily divorced, M/M, Post-Canon Fix-It, Stanley Urisk Lives, comedy with a dose of Eddie angst, featuring guest appearances by WebMD and the National Enquirer: the sources you can trust!, the only pill Eddie needs is a chill pill

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Summary:

Eddie deals with the ups and downs of getting divorced, dating a celebrity, and owning the world's cutest Pomeranian.

Every Last Shred of Sanity

Author's Note:

After watching Chapter Two, it is now impossible for me to imagine a happy ending for these characters without including a Pomeranian. Thanks, movie.

Oh, God. He could picture her in his head.

Parked on her side of the couch—the side where the cushion had become permanently sagged—with her iPad (last year's anniversary present) perched on her sizable lap. A full wineglass on the coffee table. Probably a plate of brownies to go with it. God, she was always getting crumbs on *his* side of the couch.

The TV was most likely on. She liked those melodramatic reality shows—all that Real Housewives stuff. It had been sort of amusing, in a perverse way.

"EDDIE!"

Her voice, coming through the phone, was like an electric shock to his eardrums. Eddie nearly dropped his phone and fumbled for control, thankful that he was alone in the dog toy aisle at Petco.

"Eddie, I can't believe it. I just *can't* believe it. I saw your posts about Mercedes and I figured you bought a new car, but then I saw the pictures and just about died. Tell me it isn't true, Eddie! Mercedes *can't* be a dog. She just can't be!"

"Yes, Myra," said Eddie. His words came out clipped as he paced in front of the chew toys. "I have a dog now. The dog's name is Mercedes. Have you been internet-stalking me again?"

"I just *worry* about you! I don't see how a dog can be *any* good with your allergies!"

"Marty, please." Eddie winced as the old nickname slipped out. It was still habit, even four months after the divorce. "I've been to my allergist and it's fine. She's an outdoor dog."

"I still don't think this is a good idea. You can pick up fleas from dogs. And think of the diseases! Dogs are so *filthy*."

"She's had all her fucking shots, Myra! She's not a wild animal!"

Myra's slight *gasp* punched Eddie right in the chest. Never mind the fact that he had been *whisper*-shouting so security wouldn't peg him as a madman and drag him out of the store. He had been unkind—a real fucking dick—and for all her post-divorce clinginess, Myra did not deserve unkindness.

Eddie took a breath, shoved aside the old longing for his inhaler, and tried to scrape the edges out of his voice.

"You don't need to worry about me. I have all my doctors on speed-dial here, just like I did in New York. And if anything ever happens, I'll—I'll call you too, all right?"

The silence went on forever. Eddie could hear high-pitched shouts in the background—probably the Real Housewives of New Jersey waging war over a cocktail party.

"She's a cute dog," Myra admitted. "*Mercedes*—that's cute, too. You always had such a thing for cars. What breed is she?"

"She's a Pomeranian."

"That's a mouthful. What made you get one of those?"

Eddie's eyes strayed to the palm of his hand, where he still sometimes imagined the ghost of an old scar. "It's kind of an inside joke."

(It was better, at least, than Richie's suggestion for a dog. *Hey, Eddie, let's get a St. Bernard. We can name her after your mom. Yeah, no thanks. Sonia the St. Bernard was never going to happen.*)

"Well I hope you're taking your allergy medicine," said Myra. "You'll break out in hives if you don't take it—I *know* you will."

"I've got it all worked out."

Another ghost came to haunt him: this time the old *beep-beep-beep* of

his childhood wristwatch, accompanied by his mother's voice. *Always take your medicine when your watch tells you to, Eddie-Bear. One of these days you're going to be ALL better, as long as you take good care of yourself.*

He banished the voice and started edging to the end of the aisle. A family with a shopping cart was coming down the opposite side.

"I have to go, Myra. Please don't worry about me, all right?" *That's not your job anymore*, he nearly added, but didn't. "I'm taking all my meds and I'm going to be fine."

"If you say so, Eddie." Myra did not sound convinced. In fact, she sounded so much like Eddie's mother (*Dr. Handor says nothing's wrong, Eddie-Bear, but I don't believe him for an instant*) that she would probably start all over again if he didn't cut her off. "Please, *please* call me the moment something goes wrong," Myra begged. "You know I don't trust that *comedian* to look after you."

"I promise I'll call. Now really, I have to go! Bye."

Jeez.

Eddie couldn't shove his phone into his back pocket fast enough, then immediately felt guilty for it. Myra didn't mean any harm. She never had. He had met her at a horribly significant time in his life, when his mother lay on her deathbed. As his mother passed out of Eddie's life, Myra immediately stepped in to pick up where Sonia Kaspbrak had left off.

The habit of fussing over Eddie's health must be a stubborn one indeed. Every now and then, Myra simply couldn't help herself. She would go online, devour all of Eddie's social media (he couldn't *quite* be enough of a dick to block her) and then call him out of the blue with, *Oh Eddie, I hope you're taking your vitamins* or *Eddie, I heard there's a virus outbreak on the West Coast* or *Eddie, you're probably going to die because you've adopted a DOG and if you're not careful your throat's going to close right up like a vacuum-sealed bag!*

"No," Eddie muttered to himself, his fingers instinctively flexing for an inhaler that wasn't there. That last thought sounded more like

Pennywise than Myra.

Yet another fucking ghost.

He forced himself to think of Mercedes instead. How fast her tail would wag if he brought home a new toy. After all, he wasn't standing *right* in the dog toy aisle for absolutely no reason. Now that the interruption had ended, he could get back to work on browsing the toy selections.

Anything with a built-in squeaker was automatically out. (What if it came loose and Mercedes choked on it?)

Toys with ribbons and bells and other accessorized shit were also out. (Again, choking hazard!)

She'd probably like to play with a rawhide bone, but how could he be sure it wouldn't make her sick?

And what the—

What the actual *fuck* was a pig's ear supposed to be? Was that the actual ear from a *pig*?

Maybe a stuffed animal was best. Here was one shaped like a rabbit. That was pretty cute.

But what if she chews it apart and the stuffing comes out and she EATS it? I'll never forgive myself!

The stuffed rabbit went back on the shelf. Eddie chose a set of toy balls—small enough for a dog Mercedes' size, but too big for her to swallow—and dropped them into his cart. This was soon followed by a bag of organic, pro-health dog food—the most expensive bag in the store, but if you wanted the good shit you had to pay for it. *This* dog food was loaded with vitamins, made with all-natural ingredients, contained no GMOs, *and* was specifically designed for the digestive systems of small dogs.

He headed for the checkout counter, doubled back, picked out an extra flea collar (*just* in case), headed back to the checkout, and prayed there weren't any stalkerish, paparazzi-types loitering around

Petco. He couldn't believe how many people were interested in *him* since Richie went public about their relationship, and it had only gotten worse since they adopted Mercedes. There Eddie would be, minding his own fucking business, walking out of Petco with a bag of oral hygiene dog treats, when some prick would come out of the shadows and say something creepy, like, *Hey, aren't you the guy who's involved with that one comedian?* and Eddie would immediately tell him to shove his camera up his ass. There was no shortage of people seeking material for their celebrity blogs or hoping to sell to the tabloids. Fucking ridiculous.

(It was like people didn't even *see* the scar on Eddie's cheek. Come on. It was clearly the type of scar that said, *Look, I'm dangerous. My childhood enemy fucking stabbed me in the face, so I pulled that knife right out and stabbed him back. Don't fuck with me.*)

Sure enough, he took his purchases and stepped out into the blinding California sun (it made him a little homesick for the clouds over New York) and some lady in oversized sunglasses *stared* rudely in Eddie's direction, like he'd come out carrying a severed head instead of a Petco shopping bag.

"Hey, if you can spare just a minute, would you—"

"Fuck off," said Eddie, and headed to his car.

*

All his tolerance for Myra came to an abrupt end that night.

It was Saturday and Eddie was alone. Richie's career took him out of town pretty often, so Eddie had the dog to keep him company. He kept her outside, of course, since pet hair was one of the #1 sources of allergens in the home, but Mercedes had a very comfortable dog house on the back patio. It contained the softest fleece-lined dog bed Eddie could find and had a carpet leading up to the doorway. Mercedes was currently on the lawn, yapping at a bird as darkness began to descend.

Eddie had an ominous feeling as he switched on the TV.

He half-expected to see clown makeup and orange hair in the glow of his 40-inch flatscreen, but he saw nothing more interesting than a commercial for Taco Bell's latest monstrosity. The TV was mainly on for background noise, anyway.

The feeling persisted, though, as Eddie sat down with his take-out dinner from the local vegan restaurant. Eddie was no stranger to unusual premonitions. He got them all the time while driving unfamiliar territory. No matter where he was heading, Eddie never had to read a map or use a GPS because somehow he just *knew* what direction to take. A compass inside his head, Bill called it when they were kids. Eddie's dad always said the same thing when Eddie was little—before his dad became deathly ill and his mom became a Health Nazi—when the two of them took weekend drives together.

This new premonition was far less comfortable. It wasn't the ease of switching to the correct lane or choosing the right exit before the road signs appeared. *This* was far more similar to that night in Derry not so long ago, when they all sat down to dinner and suspected this was more than a reunion of old friends.

Eddie swallowed hard, fighting the old tightness in his throat, and made himself *breathe*.

The kitchen led to the patio through a sliding glass door. Eddie could see Mercedes on the other side of the glass, *lap-lap-lapping* at her water dish.

A clock shaped like a '58 Corvette *tick-tocked* to the left of the kitchen table.

The TV kept blaring commercials in the next room.

Eddie had only taken several bites of his dinner (gluten-free lentil pasta tossed with roasted vegetables and dairy-free, soy-free parmesan), when the word "closet" caught his attention.

He hadn't been paying much attention to the channel when he turned the TV on, but now his ears were fully alert. The program was one of those sordid exposés that delved into people's family secrets, covering topics such as "I Married a Serial Killer" or "My Mom Was a

Shoplifter" or "My Dad was in the Mob." Tonight's episode froze Eddie's blood when he heard the title.

I Married a Closet Case.

And there she was on-screen, taking up two-thirds of a beige loveseat, twisting her hands nervously in her lap. The camera panned in closer, highlighting the expensive glitter of her jewelry. (Good to know all that alimony he paid was going to a good cause.) She wore a lot of makeup, too—more than he'd ever seen her wear since their wedding.

Their *sham* wedding.

And Myra was right there, on his fucking TV, ready to tell the whole world about it.

Like a shark drawn to blood in the water, Eddie was lured to the TV, his lentil pasta forgotten on the kitchen table. He didn't even realize what he'd done until the TV was a foot from his face.

Don't sit close to the TV, Eddie, his mother's ghost warned him. *You'll strain your eyes.*

Eddie didn't move a goddamn muscle. He just stood there and stared, like he'd been caught in the deadlights, and watched his private life get dragged through the mud on national television.

"You and your ex-husband were married for three years," said the interviewer, an overdressed woman whose face was probably 90% Botox. "Were there ever any warning signs about his sexuality?"

"No," said Myra, practically sobbing it out. "Of course, we were hardly ever *intimate*, but I always chalked it up to all of his health concerns! For a while I thought it might be erectile dysfunction and he was simply too embarrassed to mention it. Most men *do* get so embarrassed over that. And it wouldn't have been strange at all for Eddie to have E.D., since he suffered from *lots* of afflictions! Asthma and allergies and high blood pressure and all sorts of things. He had *seven* different doctors treating him while we were married. How could I possibly *suspect* anything when Eddie was so unwell most of

the time?"

"Do you think it's possible he over-emphasized his health problems to avoid making love to you?" asked Botox Lady.

"I don't know." Myra dabbed at her eyes with a tissue. "He could have. I mean, there *were* times when I tried to get him in the mood, but it always triggered Eddie's asthma and he couldn't breathe. You wouldn't *believe* the things that got his asthma going. He was so delicate, he couldn't even shop for my underwear without having an attack! I eventually gave up on intimacy because it broke my heart every time he had to use his inhaler. And now looking back, he was probably just faking it because he—he was too gay to be with me!"

Myra sobbed and dabbed at her eyes again.

Eddie switched off the TV.

He continued to stand a foot from the screen, rooted to the spot. Completely numb. Had the world turned upside-down in the last several minutes? Had Pennywise returned and infiltrated the airwaves just to fuck with him?

What *else* was Myra saying about Eddie? How he frequently texted her "mom" by mistake and then blamed it on auto-correct? How he never learned how to cook or do laundry because his *real* mommy did every little thing for him? What else, Myra? *WHAT ELSE?*

He was clutching the TV remote in a death grip, holding on so hard that the buttons would likely leave holes in his skin, but somehow it kept him from running to the nearest pharmacy and raiding their inhaler supply.

Breathe. Breathe. Just fucking BREATHE.

Things would only get worse from here. He wouldn't be able to leave the house without some asshole recognizing him and saying, *Hey, aren't you the guy who faked an illness to avoid his wife's ladyparts?* How could Myra do this to him? She checked up on him every few weeks to fuss over his health, but she couldn't care *that* much if she was willing to risk giving him a heart attack.

Was he on the verge of a heart attack?

Eddie sat himself down and checked all his vital signs, then opened his WebMD app to run through the symptoms checklist. According to WebMD, he might have a combination of severe hypertension, blood poisoning, and pulmonary disease, but he could safely say no heart attacks were on the horizon.

Great. This was *great*.

*

A handful of pills and a glass of water later, Eddie felt prepared to call Myra and give her a piece of his mind. This consisted of leaving her a long, rambling voicemail because New York was three hours ahead and Myra always went to bed early anyway, because her social life had been limited to Eddie and her two cousins in New Jersey, and *Eddie* always went to bed early since a full eight hours of sleep was fucking *paramount* to good health.

Next he called Richie, who was also three hours ahead, but Richie picked up the phone because he was often awake at all hours doing who-knew-what.

(Sometimes Eddie *did* know what, and ended up wishing that he didn't. One time, he woke up around midnight and found Richie in the backyard doing Samuel L. Jackson impressions while Mercedes sat there watching him, confusedly thumping her tail each time some variation of "motherfucker" came out. Eddie wisely asked no questions and went back to bed.)

"Whoa, whoa, slow down," Richie said once Eddie launched into his story. "You're telling me your ex-wife's on TV talking shit about you?"

"Yes!" Eddie was frantically pacing the house at this point. "She's on this stupid bullshit sob-story show telling everyone that my coming-out was this big huge bombshell because she couldn't tell the difference between having asthma and not wanting to fuck her! The interviewer actually *suggested* that I was faking my asthma so I wouldn't have to sleep with Myra, and Myra fucking bought it!"

"Your asthma is fake," Richie pointed out. "Your mom spent years lying to you and then *you* lied to Myra. Why are you so upset over this? All it does is make Myra look bad. I mean, she'd have to be pretty fucking stupid if she couldn't figure out that *you* were in the closet."

"Thanks a lot, Richie. Fuck you."

"I'm kind of in the middle of a tour right now, but if you're *that* eager, I could cancel a few shows—"

"That's not what I meant, asshole."

They fell into their old familiar pattern of bickering, but it was *good* bickering. Eddie didn't think he could ever laugh again when Myra's face appeared on his TV, yet here he was, grinning until his face hurt while Richie joked with him on the phone, knowing exactly which buttons to push to keep Eddie from drowning in self-pity. Richie had always done that when they were kids. Always distracting Eddie when shit got serious. It had been so fucking annoying, yet it was exactly what Eddie needed most of the time.

"Here's what you need to do," said Richie. "I'll get you hooked up with those TV people and *you* can talk shit about Myra. They can call the interview 'I Married My Mother'."

"Very funny."

"I'm fucking serious! It'd be the perfect revenge move."

"I don't want any more publicity, dude. I already get way too many stalkers simply because I *live* with you. Going to Petco is fucking terrifying. I don't know what scares me more: some journalist snapping an embarrassing photo of me, or one of your fangirls taking me out with a sniper rifle."

"You're way more likely to win the lottery than get hit with a sniper, Eddie. Come on."

"That's where you're statistically wrong! Studies show that when you're even remotely connected to a celebrity, you increase your risk of getting kidnapped, blackmailed, or murdered."

"So you want me to like, quit my job?"

Yes, Eddie thought, much to his surprise. He immediately felt like a traitor and banished that thought. "I just don't want to go on TV and make this situation even more visible than it already is. I'll be lucky if the *National Enquirer* doesn't get their hands on this shit. They'll have me pegged as some terminally-ill weirdo who can't get an erection because I'm half-vampire or something."

"Sounds fucking hot."

"*Shut up*, Richie."

Eddie was grinning again when he hung up the phone, but that grin quickly slid off his face. He wished he could blame it on the stab wound, since excessive talking or laughing *did* aggravate his cheek sometimes, but he knew it wasn't that.

Richie had calmed him down enough to realize that maybe there was some truth to that stupid interview.

He had known all along that he never should have married Myra. It hadn't been fair to either of them. But there he was, fresh from his mother's graveside, and there was Myra, looking so much like Sonia Kaspbrak that she could have been her ghost. It had always been easier to let his mother take care of things than go out and actually face the world. Face who he really *was*. Every time he tried to leave home, he was lured right back to the comfort and security of his mother's domain, where he could keep on *pretending* like he was still a scared teenager trying to suppress urges that were deemed—in his mother's words—"unhealthy."

He wanted to be healthy for his mother's sake. Wanted to at least *appear* normal. And Myra had been sweet; far sweeter than Sonia could ever be. That had been the deciding factor when Eddie finally broke down and tied the knot. He may not ever love Myra, he told himself, but at least she would be kind to him.

It only showed how little backbone he possessed, until Mike's phone call finally spurred him to action. Funny how a call from a forgotten friend had done more for him than all the marriage therapists in the

world ever could. Looking back, he *knew* his relationship with Myra should have been the event that pulled him out of the closet. It had been so obvious, even Myra should have seen it. What kind of husband started wheezing every time his wife's hands went near his dick?

If he wanted to be completely honest (which, admittedly, *did* become easier every day), he was just as bad for Myra as Myra was bad for him.

This still didn't stop him from going online an hour later, torturing himself with the entire interview, and then tossing and turning in bed all night while he thought of all the ways this could statistically Ruin His Life.

There was definitely a 99.9% chance he was going to feel like shit in the morning.

*

The sympathy calls poured in while he was halfway through breakfast.

Eddie was actually eating a bowl of Richie's *cereal*, rather than his usual date bar and dairy-free yogurt. Let gluten do its worst!

Ben called first. Richie sent him the link to the interview and Ben offered Eddie his support with so much genuine *warmth*, he could single-handedly melt the polar ice caps. Even though Ben had lost all his childhood weight, Eddie still thought of him as a human teddy bear.

"If you need me to build you a fortress to keep the media out of your hair, just let me know," said Ben, and he was probably only halfway joking. "I'm passing the phone to Beverly now. She wants to talk to you."

And then it was Beverly's turn to comfort Eddie. The very sound of her voice soothed him, since Beverly *knew* what it was like to marry a replica of your terrible parent, spend years denying yourself happiness, and then leave that parent-spouse for your childhood

friend. (The parallels were actually pretty eerie, when Eddie thought them over.)

"Tom's been spreading some very nasty rumors since I filed for divorce," said Beverly. "Half my old colleagues won't even speak to me anymore. But you *will* get through it, Eddie. Compared to Pennywise, what's some bad publicity here and there? Your *friends* are here for you."

She was right, of course. Good old Beverly.

Mike called next. He offered to get on the next flight to California and establish himself as Eddie's personal bodyguard. Eddie thanked him and said it wasn't necessary. Next came Bill, who offered to base his next monster character on Myra. Eddie thanked *him* as well and said he would consider it.

Stan's advice was typical. He told Eddie to ignore the whole thing, that the media was just a circus that thrived on spectacles, and he was better off remembering that reality had nothing to do with the wild stories portrayed on TV.

Thanks, grandpa, Eddie almost told him, then realized it sounded *too* much like Richie. It would have been a valid response, though. Eddie wasn't sure if Stan even *owned* a TV.

He was starting to feel better until the text message from Myra arrived:

Eddie please call me.

(Was that why he felt so sick all of a sudden? Or was it the gluten? *Oh, God. Please don't be the gluten.*)

Calling Myra last night had been easy. He *knew* it was going to voicemail. But now? Now she was going to talk back. She was probably going to cry. It would be the summer of '89 all over again: little Eddie lying in the hospital with a fresh cast on his arm, while his mother loomed over him with tears in her eyes, crying and pleading until Eddie finally cried too and agreed to stop seeing his friends. Hell, it had been *Myra's* tears that nearly made him rethink

the divorce several times. What would he do now, if Myra cried hard enough? Get rid of the dog and increase his pill intake?

No, Eddie told himself, then thought it again for good measure. NO.

Myra couldn't control him. His mother's ghost couldn't control him. He fought a shapeshifting clown monster twice in his life, freed himself from the closet after years of living a lie, and allowed himself to have what *he* wanted for the first time in an eternity.

Bitching at his ex-wife couldn't possibly be scarier than any of that shit.

Myra picked up right away on the first ring.

"Eddie. Hi."

She sounded entirely unlike herself. (Embarrassed? Apologetic? Scared? All of the above?) This was not the same Myra who called him in a frenzy because she learned he had a *dog* at his house.

"I'm sorry I couldn't get an erection," Eddie blurted out.

"What?"

"I'm sorry I couldn't—wait, more like *wouldn't*—get hard. Aroused. A stiffie. A chub. A boner. Wood. Richie probably knows more words than I do, but you get the idea. I'm sure you're actually quite attractive, but I was blinded the whole time by my flaming gayness and again, I'm sorry."

"Oh, *Eddie*." And suddenly she was the old Myra again. "I didn't *mean* to make you feel bad. I never imagined you would ever watch that show! Is your blood pressure okay? Have you taken your medicine?"

"My blood pressure's fine. No thanks to you."

"Eddie, please! Don't be mad. You know I *hate* it when you're mad at me. I only agreed to do that interview because, well—I just wanted to tell my side of the story. When that *comedian*—"

"Goddamn it, Myra, his name is Richie. Is that really so hard to say?"

"When that *comedian*," Myra persisted, "came out and went public about you two, nobody asked how *I* felt. The whole time the media covered our divorce, they made it sound like a farce—like it was something entertaining. Like our marriage was a joke!"

Hate to break it to you, Myra, but our marriage WAS a joke, Eddie thought, but wisely didn't say.

He settled instead for, "You know those dirty-family-secret-exposé shows are entertainment too, right? They revolve around ratings and melodrama."

"I *know*," Myra wailed. "But it was nice to have someone *listen* to me. Before that interview, no one understood how bewildering it feels for your husband to take off into the blue to a hometown you've never even *heard* of, refuse to answer your calls and messages, tell his boss he needs to go on sick leave without bothering to tell *you* about it, finally show up *weeks* later with a half-healed wound on his face, announce that he's gay and your marriage was a sham, file for divorce, and to top it all off, leave you for some crass stand-up guy he supposedly knew from his lost childhood!"

"Wow." Eddie released all the pent-up breath he'd been holding. "That, uh—that really sums it up."

"Do you *understand*, Eddie? This whole thing has been hard for me too! I invested so much of my time making sure you didn't get hurt or sick, trying to make myself *useful* to you however I could, only to watch you flee to the other side of the country with a man who can't *possibly* be good for you!"

"Myra, please. Don't drag Richie into this."

"Why shouldn't I? It's his fault our problems went public in the first place. If he wasn't *famous* and didn't go spreading your name around, we could have had a nice quiet divorce and no one would have asked me for an interview."

That was actually... pretty fucking true. Not that Eddie would ever admit that to *her*.

"If you want to punish me for dating a celebrity, then fine," he sighed. "I deserve it. I deserve a lot of shit. I was a terrible husband."

"Oh, Eddie, *nooo*. Don't say that! You were just... figuring things out."

That might actually be the sanest thing that had ever come out of Myra's mouth.

"Let's agree that we both have a lot to be sorry for," Eddie suggested. "Does that sound reasonable?"

"All right, Eddie. I agree."

Eddie just hoped she never found out that his asthma was all in his head. Then she would *really* lose her shit.

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The fallout from the interview eventually blew over. Eddie didn't need any bodyguards or fortresses, though he did tell Bill that if his next book needed a villain, his mother would make an excellent monster. ("Just don't tell Richie. He doesn't need any more mom-joke fodder.")

Eddie discovered from his next-door neighbor that the *National Enquirer* did make a spectacle of him, but the article was small and it was actually pretty funny. According to the *Enquirer*, Eddie was a dark sorcerer who married Myra so he could bring his mother back from the dead. This caused Myra to become possessed by Sonia Kaspbrak's spirit for all eternity. Sorcerer-Eddie had second thoughts and tried to reverse the spell, was unsuccessful, and had no choice but to divorce her and run away to live among the demon gays of Los Angeles.

When Richie got home from his comedy tour, he put the article in a fucking picture frame.

Things were always a little weird when Richie first came home. At first he would *hesitate* around Eddie, like he was thirteen all over again, afraid to let his feelings out. But then Richie would remember that this was *okay*, that he could actually have this, that he was a goddamn adult who didn't have to worry about Henry Bowers giving

him shit if he *looked* at Eddie a certain way.

Eddie understood the hesitation. He felt the same way sometimes, like he was living in a dream that would dissolve if he didn't tread carefully. It came from all those years of fighting himself, growing sick on his own guilt, thinking he didn't deserve happiness because his mother would call his boyhood urges "unhealthy." But fuck that. He could be happy. He was *allowed* to be happy. And despite Myra's continual criticism of Richie, Eddie *was* content with his new life.

Most of the time.

The downside to Richie's career—aside from the frequent trips out of town and the unwanted publicity—was that sometimes he had nothing going on during the daylight hours, so he was left to his own devices while Eddie went to work. It had been relatively easy for Eddie to relocate his job to Los Angeles, since the insurance company he worked for was huge and had offices literally everywhere. All he had to do was transfer. Richie still didn't understand *why* he would keep the same job when there were so many other, way-less-boring ones out there, but Eddie liked being a risk analyst.

He did *not* like spending eight hours in the office while Richie was dickin' around at home. Eddie strongly suspected that Richie was letting the dog in the house, but he couldn't get any proof because their part-time maid did a damn good job cleaning up the evidence. Awfully funny how Eddie's allergies acted up the minute he came home, though.

(According to WebMD, this might be a sign of acute pneumonia.)

Thursday afternoon, two weeks after the *Enquirer* article, was a prime example of why Eddie should *really* install cameras all over the house.

His emergency phone call to the Hanscom-Marsh household went like this:

Rrrriing, rrrriing—click. "This is Ben Hanscom. May I ask who's calling?"

"Ben! Is Beverly there?"

"Yeah, we're just finishing dinner—"

"Get her! *Now*."

Muffled footsteps. Glassware clinking against a table. *Honey, it's Eddie. Sounds like an emergency.*

"Eddie? Is everything okay?"

"Bev, I need you to convince me not to murder Richie."

"*What?*"

"Convince me—not to—*murder* him. I'm at the vet right now with a sick dog! The vet *says* she's not sick—that everything's just fine!—but we'll see about that when I get a second opinion!"

"Eddie, calm down. What happened?"

"Richie was at home with the dog and our maid had the day off. *That's* what fucking happened. Richie spilled Cheerios all over the kitchen floor and instead of using a broom or a vacuum like a normal person, he let Mercedes eat all the Cheerios off the floor! *Cheerios*, Bev! Do you know what Cheerios could do to a pedigreed dog's digestive system?"

"Dogs can actually handle more than you think. Ben gives Bucky table scraps once in a while and Bucky's never gotten sick."

"Thanks, Bev. Now you've gone and tarnished my image of Ben. He had me convinced he was perfect."

"Letting your dog eat people food doesn't make you a monster. At least it was only Cheerios and not chocolate."

"Why? What does chocolate do? Is chocolate bad?"

"Um. Well, maybe you should talk to the vet—"

"Is chocolate BAD, Bev?"

"For dogs. It's bad for *dogs*. It's like feeding them poison. Small doses usually aren't deadly, I think."

"Son of a bitch. I'll need to have several more tests run—"

"Eddie, I'm sure you would know by now if Mercedes ate chocolate."

"You can't know that for *sure*! Mercedes is very small and very cute and very dependent on me, and I just want her to be safe!"

Deep breath.

"I know. It's perfectly normal to feel that way about your pet. But Eddie... I really hate to tell you this, but... don't you think you're acting a little like your mother?"

Silence.

Papers rustling. *Mr. Kaspbrak, these are the test results. Are you sure you want to go through with—*

Yes, yes! Run them all!

"Eddie?"

"My mother, Beverly? You think I'm acting like *my mother*?"

"I know I'm overstepping boundaries here, but you need to hear it! According to Richie, who just talked to Ben yesterday, you take Mercedes in for a professional flea bath every single Saturday. You tried to have her vaccinated twice because you didn't think the first shots were adequate. And every time you catch her sneezing, Richie has to stop you from rushing her to the vet."

More silence.

"I, uh—I have to go, Bev. I'll talk to you later."

Click!

*

As soon as Eddie got home from the vet, he went straight to the

backyard and let Mercedes out of her travel carrier. She certainly didn't *act* like a dog who had been subjected to the horrors of breakfast cereal. Mercedes ran around Eddie's ankles a couple of times, tore after a butterfly, and then took about a thousand laps from her water dish.

God, she was so fucking cute. He would explode if anything ever happened to her.

Eddie-Bear, please understand why you HAVE to give up those horrible friends of yours. They're dangerous. They'll get you into trouble! You know I would lose my mind if anything ever happened to you!

No.

No, no, no. Beverly was wrong. He was nothing like his mother. *Myra* was the one who pulled that shit. *She* was the Sonia-clone! It was always *Eddie, don't drive when the roads are wet!* and *Eddie, I need to take your temperature!* and—

"Mercedes, no! Don't eat that!"

Eddie snatched up the dog and held her against his chest while a beetle crawled off the patio and vanished into the grass.

"Shit," said Eddie. This was an *Enquirer* article waiting to happen.

Gay Sorcerer Possessed by His Mother's Ghost

"I tried to keep her out, but she was just too powerful!"

Mercedes wriggled until Eddie set her down. He fought the urge to check the patio for more bugs, brushed the dog hair off his clothes, and hurried into the house before he could commit any more psychological crimes against himself.

He found Richie in the living room watching *South Park* reruns. (It seemed like Richie was always watching *South Park* reruns. Like, Eddie had to really struggle to count the number of times he caught him watching anything else.)

Eddie planted himself directly in front of the TV, blocking that one obnoxious kid (Cartwheel?) from Richie's view.

"Do you think I'm turning into my mom?"

Richie paused the TV, stopping Cartwright mid-sentence. "Not even close. You'll never be that hot."

"Thanks, asshole. Can I ever bring up my departed mother without you shitting on her?"

"I called her hot! How is that shitting on her?"

Breathe. Fucking breathe, Eddie. Breathe.

"Okay, you know what? Let's start over," said Eddie, trying not to have a stroke right in front of Carthorse's stupid chubby little animated face. "While I was at the vet, rescuing our dog from *your* mistake, I had a very interesting conversation with Beverly. *She* seems to think I'm behaving like my mother!"

"*Oh*," said Richie, in exactly the same voice he used when he admitted he used Eddie's toothbrush by mistake. "She must have been talking to Ben."

"Of course she was talking to Ben. They tell each other everything! Why the hell were *you* talking to Ben about me? He's an architect! The only thing *he* could do is build me a padded cell because if I *am* turning into my mom then that means every last shred of sanity I ever possessed is fucking gone!"

"Whoa, *Eddie*. It's okay."

And Eddie almost fucking died because only Richie could say his name in that weirdly soft, uncharacteristic way of his. It made him realize that even though Richie *barely* saw any difference between dry dog food and breakfast cereal, Eddie was pretty damn lucky to have him.

"I can't turn into her," said Eddie. He spoke more calmly now, breathing deep. His fingers stopped flexing for the old familiar grip of his inhaler. "I cannot become my mother. As much as I love Mercedes, I will put her up for adoption if I subject her to that shit. I mean, God, Richie, I panicked over a handful of Cheerios. And outside just now, I freaked out because Mercedes almost ate a beetle."

"You just have to let her be a dog," said Richie. "Dogs survive a lot of dumb shit."

"We survived a lot of dumb shit," said Eddie, glancing at the smooth palm of his hand where a scar had once been.

If he focused on it hard enough, he could almost hear a clown giggling at the back of his mind. Pennywise would sure get his kicks if he could see Eddie now. *Like mommy like son, heeheehee! The apple didn't fall far from the tree, did it, mama's boy? I'll bet it never fell at all! Hahaha!*

Pennywise may be gone for good, but his tricks wouldn't be in vain if Eddie morphed into Sonia Kaspbrak 3.0. (Myra, of course, was already 2.0). Forcing his mother's agenda onto a poor, helpless animal was exactly what Pennywise would want. It would mean that Eddie hadn't learned a damn thing during his return to Derry.

His hands remained steady as he migrated to the couch, settling down next to Richie. He stared at the TV, where Carton's big mouth had gotten paused into an unflattering position.

Richie didn't unpause it. His eyes were on Eddie. "So... are you good now?"

"I think so," said Eddie. "But you've got to help me, Richie. If you catch me treating Mercedes the way my mom treated *me*, do something ridiculous, like—fuck, I don't know—moo like a cow to get me to stop. I know that's the animal that reminds you of my mom the most, right?"

"No way," said Richie. "It's actually a fox. Because your mom was so damn—"

Eddie threw a couch pillow at Richie.

He managed to miss his target, but it was definitely the intent that counted.

*

Later that night, Eddie sent all his friends a photo of Mercedes

sleeping at the foot of his bed. The following replies came in from the Losers.

Bill:

This is a big step for you, Eddie!

Ben:

Cutest little dog in the whole entire world. ❤️👤❤️👤❤️👤

Beverly:

See? A few Cheerios never hurt anyone!

Mike:

I knew you'd be bringing that dog indoors sooner or later.

Stan:

Nice.

Stan:

But you should have gotten a bird.

Author's Note:

A few fun facts:

- 1.) Ben named his dog Bucky after famous architect Buckminster Fuller.
- 2.) After making a real effort to Get His Shit Together, Eddie now only takes two medications (allergies and blood pressure).
- 3.) He still has not deleted his WebMD app, but that is a work in progress.
- 4.) Stan will never forgive Eddie for getting a dog instead of a bird.